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HEADLINE: Baltimore region set to lose 2 seats in Md. Assembly;
Two Senate districts would merge, pitting Mitchell against Della;
GOP, city protests likely

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BODY:

Two Maryland legislative districts would be shifted from the Baltimore region to the burgeoning Washington suburbs under a political map released last night by a panel appointed by the governor.

The proposal from the Governor's Redistricting Advisory Committee would also attempt to boost the numbers of African-American lawmakers in the General Assembly, in part by creating a district in Prince George's County with a large minority population.

The committee, made up of four Democrats and a Republican, would improve the prospects of Democrats across the state. Two GOP state senators on the Eastern Shore have been placed in the same district, and Democratic voters have been added to the districts of three other Republican incumbents.

Although subject to revisions and lawsuits, the boundary lines unveiled last night could well form the districts used to elect each member of the General Assembly - 47 senators and 141 delegates - in 2002.

The redistricting panel is charged with recommending to Gov. Parris N. Glendening changes to the state's political map to reflect population changes captured by the 2000 census. Glendening is expected to make only minor revisions before submitting a redistricting bill to the General Assembly on Jan. 9.

If the legislature does not alter the governor's map - and changes are unlikely because of complexity and competing interests - it becomes law 45 days later.

"I don't think there's any way to do a massive overhaul at this point in the process; nor do I think there is any overhaul needed," said Mike Morrill, spokesman for Glendening.

A public hearing on the proposal, scheduled for Friday in Annapolis, is expected to attract heated complaints from Republicans and other groups.

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"I can't go to a meeting or a public venue without someone telling me they are going to challenge," said Maryland Secretary of State John T. Willis, the panel's chairman. "I'll be very interested to see what kind of pragmatic suggestions we get."

The proposal would create major changes in Baltimore, which lost 84,860 residents between 1990 and 2000.

After the last redistricting process, the city contained five entire Senate districts, large parts of three others and small parts of two. Now, it would contain three entire Senate districts and parts of five others.

The city's 44th and 47th Senate districts would be merged, forcing Democratic Sens. Clarence M. Mitchell IV and George W. Della Jr. to run against each other in a district where 53 percent of residents would be African-American. Mitchell is black, and Della is white.

The newly configured 44th District would be divided into three subdistricts, two of which appear to protect white delegates. Democratic Del. Jacob J. Mohorovic could run as an incumbent in 44C, which would connect Dundalk and southern Baltimore across the Key Bridge. In District 44B, Democratic Del. Brian K. McHale could run as an incumbent. If they don't move or retire, three African-American delegates would be forced to run against each other for one seat in District 44A: Democrats Verna L. Jones, Jeffrey A. Paige and Ruth M. Kirk. That part of the plan is drawing the ire of some leading African-American lawmakers.

In the 46th District represented by Sen. Perry Sfikas, five incumbent delegates would run against each other for three seats if each sought re-election from their current residences: Democrats Carolyn J. Krysiak, Cornell N. Dypski and Peter A. Hammen of Baltimore and Democrats John S. Arnick and Joseph J. "Sonny" Minnick of Dundalk.

Democratic Sen. Nathaniel J. McFadden, chairman of the city Senate delegation, said he believes the governor and the commission have produced a good document, but it still will probably be challenged in court.

He said it was good to know that the commission created more opportunities for African-American representation. Of the General Assembly's 188 members, 38 are black.

"I don't think anything is going to avoid a lawsuit," McFadden said. "But it's not as bad as it could have been. The commission and the governor have done a very good job. It's a difficult job."

But Democratic Del. Howard P. Rawlings of the 40th District said the obliteration of the 44th District and the protection of two white incumbents - McHale and Mohorovic - was troublesome. Rawlings has threatened a lawsuit if Baltimore loses minority representation. He said last night that the potential loss of two African-American delegates could trigger that challenge.

"What they did was to do something that was unprecedented: They created three single-member districts, and in one of the single-member districts, they put three black incumbents," Rawlings said. The move will "undercut the main objective of increasing minority representation," he said.

Mitchell declined to comment last night, saying he had not seen the maps.

Baltimore County and other parts of the metropolitan area would also see significant changes:

Democratic Sen. Norman R. Stone Jr. of Dundalk, the legislature's longest-serving member, would be forced to run against Democratic Sen. Philip C. Jimeno of Anne Arundel if he seeks re-election. Jimeno's northern Arundel District 31 would extend into eastern Baltimore County to pick up two precincts, one of which includes Stone's home.

The 10th District represented by Democratic Sen. Delores G. Kelley would lose its city precincts and be entirely in western Baltimore County.

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Much of northern Baltimore County would be included in the 5th District represented by Republican Sen. Larry E. Haines of Carroll County.

The growing south Carroll County area would get a new subdistrict for a delegate.

Howard County would get a new Columbia-dominated District 13 that appears tailor-made for Democratic County Councilman C. Vernon Gray to run for Senate.

Montgomery County gained enough residents in the past decade to warrant an additional district. The county picked up 116,314 residents, putting its population at 873,341. Under the proposal, Montgomery County would have eight Senate districts entirely within its borders, up from seven.

The plan throws the Eastern Shore's two Republican senators, J. Lowell Stoltzfus of Somerset County and Richard F. Colburn of Dorchester County, into a redrawn 37th District. Stoltzfus, who was recently elected minority leader, said he would move to the Salisbury area to run in the new 38th District, which no longer includes Somerset.

"I feel pretty comfortable I will win it," Stoltzfus said. "It'll be a pain, especially since I just moved to a new house three weeks ago." Stoltzfus denounced the new Shore map as an example of "raw partisan politics at its worst," particularly because it splits Somerset from the other counties of the Lower Shore. "It's typical of the political culture in Maryland, unfortunately. It's a one-party state," he said.

Other Republican senators who could face more difficult re-election bids because of Democratic voters added to their district include Alex X. Mooney of Frederick, Jean W. Roesser of Montgomery County and Nancy Jacobs of Harford County.

Sun staff writers Michael Dresser and Ivan Penn contributed to this article.

GRAPHIC: PHOTO(S) / MAP(S), 1. John T. Willis, chairman of the redistricting committee., said people have told him that they will challenge its proposal.; , 2. New districts, 1. AMY DAVIS : SUN STAFF , 2. SUN STAFF

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